

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN
GRAY 207

being swept towards the jagged edge of some black cleft of precipice. He knew what was waiting for him there; he saw it indeed, and, shuddering, crushed with dank hands his burning lids as though he would have robbed the very brain of sight, and driven the eyeballs back into their cave. It was useless. The brain had its own food on which it batten- ed, and the imagination, made grotesque by terror, twisted and distorted as a living thing by pain, danced like some foul puppet on a stand, and grinned through moving masks. Then, suddenly, Time stopped for him. Yes: that blind, slow-breathing thing crawled no more, and horrible thoughts, Time being dead, raced on in front, and dragged a hideous future from its grave, and showed it to him. He stared at it. Its very horror made him stone.

At last the door opened, and his servant entered. He turned glazed eyes upon him.

"Mr. Campbell, sir/* said the man.

A sigh of relief broke from his parched lips, and the colour came back to his cheeks.

"Ask him to come in at once, Francis." He felt that he was himself again. His mood of cowardice had passed away.

The man bowed, and retired. In a few moments Alan Campbell walked in, looking very stern and rather pale, his pallor being intensified by his coal-black hair and dark eyebrows.

"Alan! this is kind of you. I thank you for

coming/

"I had intended never to enter your house again, Gray;

But you said it was a matter of life and death."

His voice was hard and cold. He spoke with slow deliberation. There was

a look of contempt in the steady searching gaze that he turned

on Dorian. He kept his hands in the pockets of his Astrakhan

coat, and seemed not to have noticed the gesture with which

he had been greeted.

"Yes: it is a matter of life and death, Alan, and to more

than one person. Sit down."

Campbell took a chair by the table, and Dorian sat opposite

to him. The two men's eyes met. In Dorian's there was

infinite pity. He knew that what he was going to do was

dreadful.

After a strained moment of silence, he leaned across and said,

very quietly, but watching the effect of each word upon the

face of him he had sent for, "Alan, in a locked room at the top

of this house, a room to which nobody but myself has access, a

dead man is seated at a table. He has been dead ten hours now.